

Meat-eating Rabbit?



The enclosed photos taken in Corinth last winter show a rabbit eating a blue jay. A cooperative extension agent said nature's "vegetarians" will eat meat when the chance arises. How common is this?

Kevin and Beverly Moran
Corinth, Saratoga County

You're lucky to have caught such an unusual sight on film. We checked numerous references, but couldn't find anything about rabbits eating meat. While it's uncommon for nature's vegetarians to stray from herbivory, wildlife is opportunistic. Your rabbit may have been taking advantage of a free meal, perhaps the blue jay met its unfortunate fate by flying into a window or side of the house. Thanks for sending us the photo; it's certainly a thrill to catch a glimpse of the oddities Mother Nature has to offer.

—Dave Nelson, Editor

Eagle Sighting

As I was driving from my dentist to the Thruway, I saw a bald eagle on Carman Road in Rotterdam. I managed to take a few photographs—he sat in a tree for a bit, then finally nailed a squirrel and was gone. While I have seen a couple of eagles at the Watervliet Reservoir on Route 20 and one up by Basic Creek Reservoir near Westerlo, this eagle on Carman Road was the closest encounter—a thrill for me!

Roy Saplin
Altamont, Albany County



Wow—great shot here, Roy. On first glance, it certainly seems unusual for a bald eagle to be in the Carman Road area, but I checked a map and noticed it is very close to the Watervliet Reservoir. We do have eagles there regularly, so this could explain your sighting. It is still pretty unusual for a bald eagle to be there and to be taking a mammal. Although they do eat mammals, their diet is almost entirely fish.

—Peter Nye, Leader of DEC's Endangered Species Unit

Something's Amiss

This picture was taken in the Village of Arcade by our grandson Eric Pettit. We have seen the large doe for the past three or four years. We wonder if the other deer may be her sibling. They have been seen together in a number of areas of the village.

Alton Pettit
Arcade, Wyoming County



Thanks for sharing your photo of such an unusual situation. While uncommon, we occasionally see deer that survive severe injuries and remain mobile and otherwise healthy on three legs. Yet to see two deer together, both with similar leg amputations, is unusual. That the two deer are together may suggest some familial relationship, but the condition of their right hind legs should not be assumed to be inherited. Leg amputations in deer typically occur due to severe trauma, such as from a vehicle collision or a compound fracture of the leg.

—Jeremy Hurst, DEC Wildlife Biologist



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Of a Feather: A Brief History of American Birding

by Scott Weidensaul
368 pages, \$25.00 hardcover
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishers
www.harcourtbooks.com; (800) 225-5425

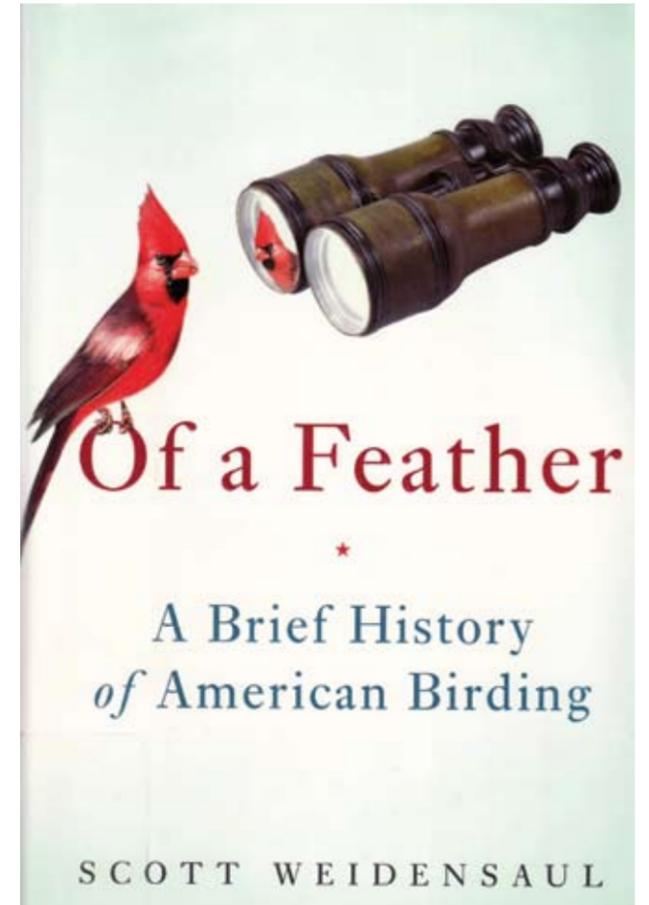
Birding, as Weidensaul describes, is "utterly conventional [and] fully mainstream." *Of a Feather* starts and ends in the excitement of the present—birding from Maine to Alaska. In between, Weidensaul recounts a fascinating history—from the discovery of birds on a new continent (by people who became unlikely heroes) to birding and conservation as we know them today.

The early days in America featured "shotgun ornithology," when the only accepted sighting was of a bird in the hand. Birds never before seen by Europeans were collected and described at a rapid pace. Many of these pioneers had checkered pasts and lacked formal training, but they came to America and became immersed in the discovery of new species of birds.

Those early days were also ones of excessive collection and even wanton destruction. Birds were shot indiscriminately and their eggs collected by the thousands. Battles raged between collectors and preservationists. Sometimes the battle was literal, as early wardens were killed trying to protect the birds. Egret plumes, and even entire songbirds, adorned ladies' hats; only with pressure from the ladies themselves were the egrets saved. Sadly, the great ivory-billed woodpecker was not as fortunate. This great denizen of the southern swamps was collected, sold, and decimated throughout its historical range.

Alexander Wilson, author of the early 1800's collection *American Ornithology*, and considered the "Father of American Ornithology," and John James Audubon, author of *Birds of America* and a name synonymous with birds, were among many influential figures for whom birds were named.

In 1934, a shy young artist from Jamestown, New York named Roger Tory Peterson published *A Field Guide to the Birds*. With his simplified approach to identifying birds at a distance, Peterson helped open up birding to the masses. Other guidebooks followed, including recent works by Kenn Kaufman and David Sibley.



Thirty years ago, "the 600 Club" was an elusive goal for one's "life list" of North American birds. Remote areas, such as Alaska's outer Aleutians, were just becoming known and available to birders. The bar has since been raised, as many "listers" have passed the 700 mark. Weidensaul ends with a timely discussion of the intersection of birding and science, and the role birders must play in conservation.

Of a Feather is an important book, and a must-read for everyone who cares about the history—and future—of birds and birding in America.

Lifelong birder **Scott Stoner** has traveled from Florida to Alaska in the pursuit—and enjoyment—of birds. He answers many of the bird-related letters to *Conservationist*.